

Community Journal

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photo by Mysara McCarty



TO BEGIN

by Liz Porter

remember
how the world appeared
when you were three or two
or one more or less
words were not defined
by letters then
not by habit, tribal rule
doctrine or creed
colors lived
like light on water
sky was not up
nor earth down
chocolate was not just
sweet, but was also mud
to play in, smear on, throw
and eat, fecundity was endless
like Kansas topsoil used to be
black, affluent in the hand
it crumbled, transmuted
and made more . . .
watermelons and their speckled
slippery seeds shimmered and came
with grandmother's blessing
inside, red penetrated
felt itself, knew death
and the ripeness just before
knew how to howl, keen, turn
shining white with recognition:
ply your river with that joy
get under the color
inside the creature
with fathomless eyes
listening, liminal
quivering
to begin



Children in Community

BY JEANNIE FELKER

Jeannie Felker is teacher of the kindergarten at the Antioch School in Yellow Springs. This account was culled from several of her "teacher's notes" articles published over the years in the school's newsletter.

The school year usually starts off rather simply for me since most of my children come into kindergarten having spent a year together in Ann's nursery program. After sharing that year together, the children have common expectations, common rules, and common methods for solving problems. They come to me with a sense of community already established.

This year has been different since over half of the kindergartners were new to the school and to each other.

The group was made up of children from six different schools, bringing six different ways of spending a day together.

The children began tentatively in twosomes and threesomes, old friends sticking together, new friends bonding with one other person. But as we talked together, the children started to look closely at one another and to see the things they had in common.

The scrutiny of each other went on for weeks. At lunch people sorted each other out by saying things like:

"If you have a sandwich, raise your hand."

"If you have a juice box, raise your hand."

"If you have a thermos, raise your hand."

In the morning, one child would say to another, "I have a dress just

like yours at home." Or "Hey, look! We've both got black shoes and black pants. Want to go on the tire swing?" The increased awareness of each other influenced the rules they made for the group:

"No pushing or kicking," everyone agreed.

"No calling people names," someone else added.

Here are the rules they eventually agreed upon:

1. Don't hit. Just use words.
2. Don't kick. Just say what you want.
3. Don't push. Take turns
4. Be kind to spiders.
5. Don't grab the juice pitcher. Say, "Please pass the juice."
6. Don't call people names. Just use their real name.
7. If you want seconds at snack,



don't take all the crackers. Remember to share.

8. Don't yell at the guinea pig. Zippity likes gentle voices.

9. Don't hit the guinea pig cage. Animals get scared too.

10. Listen to your friends.

11. Don't make too much rules.

There is something about being seen, truly known by others, which has always seemed to me to be a very basic human need. To me, it is the source of trust in others, of self-acceptance, of growth, the very place where real learning of all kinds can take root and flourish. So I was challenged this fall to find myself with a group of children where "don't look at me" was a phrase I heard almost every day. It seemed that we needed to begin by learning to see each other and taking the risk of allowing ourselves to be seen.

I began by bringing in books about feelings for us to read and discuss. As I suspected, I was the only person in the group who was ever afraid, angry, frustrated, or hurt. I seemed to be the only person in the group who ever found some things hard to do. I was the only person who was not an expert on almost everything.

We began to do some daring things. We took a walk to the swing-

ing bridge and crossed it. We went to Avery's house, climbed the ladder to his tree house, and slid down a rope to the ground. We went to the Pine Forest classifying things we would not see: bears, large snakes, wolves, lions—and things we might actually see: rabbits, squirrels, skunks. But it wasn't until we went to Helen's house that anyone would admit being scared. Sitting on Helen's pulley swing high above our heads, the oldest person in the group said, "I'm scared."

"Of course you are," I replied. "You're up very high and you've never been on this swing before. What can we do to help?"

"Let go of the rope very slowly," came the shaky reply. No one laughed. Everyone watched quietly. Maybe it was all right to be scared.

Next we talked about crying. Was it all right for boys to cry? Of course. Boys cry, girls cry, men cry, women cry. Everyone feels sad sometimes, and at our school it's always safe to tell people how you feel.

A few days later a disappointed child cried on the rug. "What's wrong?" a friend asked.

"Go away. I just want to be alone."

The friend persevered. "I really want to help."

"It's just very important to me to

be first," sobbed the child.

"I know how you feel. It's important to all of us to be first," the friend comforted. "None of us gets to have our way all of the time."

Another step had been taken. You could tell a friend how you felt and he would understand and help.

Back at school from a birthday party, we carefully tied our helium balloons to our coat hooks. One child could not part with hers and brought it into the room for our end-of-the-day meeting. As balloons will, it slipped from her hand and floated to the ceiling. One of the children looked at the disappointment on her face and said, "Don't worry. I can climb up in the loft and get it."

He quickly climbed the ladder and reached out as far as he could. I held my breath as his fingers closed around the string. "We are so lucky to have someone like you in our group." I said. "Yes," he replied. "I'm tall. You need me to reach high places."

Another child had been watching from the rug. "What about me?" he asked. "Do you need me too?"

"Of course we do," the hero answered graciously. "If we ever have something high to climb, we know you can do it."

Every day at snack the children pour themselves half a cup of juice. Every



day at snack one child poured a whole cup of juice. There were gentle reminders from peers. "Oh, I forgot." the child with the full cup would reply.

Finally one child said, "It makes me angry when you pour a whole cup of juice."

"Well, I forget," the other child started, and then added more openly: "It's hard for me to stop at half."

The first child looked astonished and then said, "I've got an idea. You pour and I'll say 'stop' when you get to half." They tried it and it worked.

"Did you see that!" the first child said. "I'm teaching him what half is."

We loved COLOR days, but CLEAR day was magic. The children sat around a sunny table getting ready to paint on glass. "I just love colors," said one of the many artists in the room, "but I think I love CLEAR best."

She picked the glass up and held it in front of her face. "I can see my friends right through it."

A friend picked his glass up and looked back at her. "I see you, too. As a matter of fact I can see the whole world through CLEAR."

We can see each other. It is safe to let ourselves be seen. The learning has begun!

I never know just how the children will become a group. It always happens, but never in the same way or at the same time it has the year before. This year it happened early. All we needed was a little adversity.

We returned from an afternoon in Kit's room to find the doll corner had been turned upside down. Halfway through cleaning up one child said, "Wait. We didn't make this mess."

"I didn't think you had," I replied. "You don't treat the things in our room this way,"

Suddenly 13 children were in the doll corner. There were exclamations of dismay, bursts of indignation, and unlimited speculations as to who might be the culprits. We all worked together to put the doll corner back in order. When we were done, 13 earnest kindergartners demanded that I "do something so this won't happen again."

"This is your room," I said. "Decide what the rules should be. Think about how you feel. Then we'll write a letter to the Younger Group."

The children sailed through snack and end-of-the-day chores and met me on the rug with marker and paper. This is what they wrote:

"Dear Younger Group: We don't like it when you mess up our room. Don't come in our room when we are gone. If you come in our room, put back the toys you play with before

you leave. We don't want to pick up after you. If you want to come in our room, ask first. Don't ask Jeannie. Ask the kids. The Kindergarten"

In seven short sentences the children became a group and an active part of the school. They were the youngest, but they had a place that was their own in which they were able to establish limits and an order that would be respected by everyone.

I am always fascinated by how the individual character of each group of children I work with develops. There have been years of builders, years of scientists, years of mathematicians, years of artists. This year's group is a group of wordsmiths. From the first week of school they have chosen to spend the time I usually call "quiet reading time" with markers or pencil and paper. They have written stories, plays, and rhymes. They have made endless lists of each other's names and phone numbers, written the names of all the people in their families, left numerous signs with instructions for other children in the school, found lost treasures with signs on the front door.

So it was wonderful to watch their response when I told them we were going to have a guest for two days in our classroom.

"How do you think it would feel



to visit another class for two days?" I asked. There was silence for a moment as they thought, and then the answers came. "Scary!" "Shy!" "My tummy would feel funny!" "Wobbly!"

Then one child said, "We could write him a letter!" And they did:



Every Tuesday afternoon this year, we have gone down to the Art/Science room. We needed to go down the hall just as the Younger Group was beginning their reading time. To help the children focus on moving quietly we would play a game. We would all sit in a circle and I would whisper each

child's name, asking "How quietly will you go down the hall?" And they would whisper back: "As quietly as a . . ." For weeks, all fifteen kindergartners would respond "As quietly as a mouse." After the Big Cats came, lots of children changed their simile to "as quietly as a cheetah." But this game just wasn't going where I hoped it would.

And then in June, I said, "This is the last time we'll go to Beth's this year. How quietly will you go?" And their whispers came floating back to me as gifts:

"as quiet as a cloud in the sky when there's no wind."

"as quiet as the rabbit that sits in my yard in the morning."

"as quiet as a shark moving through water."

"as quiet as a flower before it blooms."

"as quiet as a shoe sitting on the floor waiting for someone to put it on."

Fifteen poets went tiptoeing out of the room.

Each year as school ends, I sit down with the children and remind them that our school year is almost over. We reminisce, marvel at how much each person has changed and grown, and then we make a list of all the things the

children would like to do one more time before summer vacation.

This year, high on their list of requests was to "go for another walk in the woods." I asked Chris if the Older Group could join us, and on a beautiful day we all headed off for the Pine Forest. Chris took the lead, and I walked at the end. I had the best job, for I had a complete view of the children interacting with each other.

One of my kindergartners who still lives in a very fantastic world was spinning tales of intrigue and personal heroism. "You live a very exciting life," responded his partner.

Another child, who had recently had an unpleasant encounter with stinging nettle, worried out loud about getting stung. Her partner, however, reassured her. "I know how to fix that with jewel weed. And here... Let me give you a piggyback ride so you don't have to worry for awhile."

Another kindergartner fell and scraped his knee. When we reached a stream his partner said: "I'll get a leaf for you. We can put some water on it and it will make your knee feel better. That's what I always do."

And so the walk went. Branches were held for the person coming next down the trail; people checked to make sure they were not walking too fast for their partners. And in many other different ways, I was struck by the kindness, thoughtfulness, and



acceptance of the children to each other as we walked through the Glen.

Later in the week, I asked each child to remember one thing about kindergarten and to draw or write about that memory. Everyone sat at the tables together, and the memories started flowing.

One child said: "Remember when we went to the woods, and we had to walk across that big river on those rocks?" Everyone looked up. We all knew he had been afraid. Then one of my elders said: "We all made it across safe." "Yep," added another older. "You made it across too. You just took your time and did it your own way."

The chatting stopped; everyone relaxed, and went back to their work.

One child wrote a list of memories that covered both sides of her paper. Another wrote a list of four memories. One kindergartner drew a picture of the basketball hoop and the wall opposite it. One child drew three figures at the zoo; another drew three x's in a square and remembered how we all stood under a roof at the zoo when it started to rain. A sixth child drew a smiling girl on a sunny day and came to me saying: "Will you write my words? I want to say 'I

remember how it feelled to feel the wind.'" A unicycle appeared with the words: "This unicycle is just pretend. People think they can ride it but they really can't."

As the children shared their memories, there was no judgment made by the others. The "That doesn't look like . . ." and "That's not how you make. . ." of the fall had changed into an acceptance and appreciation of each child's efforts and ideas. Seeds planted, already being harvested.

When we started in September, the group was fifteen very distinct, wary individuals. Socially, the children always seemed in flux. Alliances were made and then broken. There seemed to be very few periods of stability. There was often friction, and change seemed a constant. The week before school was out, we sat down to talk about what the children would like to do before the end of school. Most of the activities they chose were cooking activities, and what they most wanted to make was Rice Krispies treats. So we made them and as we sat at snack, enjoying the fruits of our labor,

someone asked: "Who thought of this idea?"

"Ryder!" someone answered.

"Love ya, Ryder," responded the first child.

"But I didn't make them. Love ya, Max," said Ryder, acknowledging one of the cooks.

And Max said: "Love ya, Christian," thanking a friend who helped cook.

On and on the chain of "Love Yas" went until every child in the group had been named.

Then Polo, who has been so masterful at helping the group put their feelings into words, said: "You know, I have so many best friends. Everyone in this group is my best friend."

"Yeah!" rang a chorus of agreement around the table.

Jeannie Felker is the mother of two children, now grown. She lives in Yellow Springs.

The Gift

BY M. J. RICHLEN

Community building is an ongoing focus in the daily life of a vivid group comprised of children and a beloved teacher. To the Children's Center the children come each day, cheerful, tired, grumpy, mildly ill, pleasant, lively, anxious, sad, perhaps even tearful and resistant. The entire day stretches before us. The teacher, through sheer determination, energy, wisdom, creativity, and love—love most importantly of all—transforms a somewhat raggedy group into a small, friendly community.

Each child in the group must be embraced each day with respect, appreciation, and trust, and surrounded by the nurturing comfort of loving guidance and a daily rhythm.

During the morning circle time, the words of the youngest and the oldest child are received with equal consideration. The uneven sewing of the four-year-old is as highly regarded as the more controlled stitches of the five-and-a-half-year-old. The accomplishment of putting on the jacket is admired as much as the zipping of the jacket.

Knowing that a principal mode of learning for young children is through imitation, the teacher strives to model her best example throughout the day.

In their natural, trusting manner, the children observe and imitate the teacher's gestures, words, and actions. Richard comes running by and steps on the teacher's foot. "Please be more careful next time, Richard." Kate was observing.

Lucy pushes Robert against a tricycle. Robert, crying, comes to the teacher. "Would you like help in



talking to Lucy?" Robert and his teacher go over to Lucy, who appears angry. Robert is not sure what to say so the teacher makes a suggestion, knowing full well that words must sometimes be carefully given to young children. Matthew was resting nearby on a bench and has observed the interaction.

Going hand in hand with that are opportunities for the children to take care of one another: the beginnings of empathy and graciousness. The teacher allows the children an appropriate amount of autonomy, yet with wise gentleness brings to the child's mind the presence of others. "Betty would like to play with you. How do you think she could be a part of your play?" "When do you think you will be finished so that Jack may have a turn with the puzzle?"

Young children desire to become true inhabitants of the earth. Walking on the earth to explore the immediate neighborhood enhances the child's

sense of belonging to the larger world. Another community is entered as the children leave the yard through the back gate. In taking care of Mother Earth, the children take turns carrying a canvas bag to collect litter as they deem necessary.

Put aside until middle childhood the ecology and animal kingdom lessons. Our words so often interrupt the young child's natural learning process. Once again, quiet example and simple, direct experiences beautifully merge with early childhood growth and development. Uphold the child's innate sense of wonder and joy!

The teacher is aware that the spring beauties are in blossom on Antioch's front campus. Initially most of the children run to the climbing bush. The flowers are soon discovered and little bouquets are gathered for others. The children sit and roll in the spring beauties. There is a particular pine tree whose roots have hosted many fairy houses. Silently, the teacher touches the bark and leans her ear against the trunk. What is there to be heard? The children follow this example, occasionally adding a kiss.

And so, in these ways, young children receive the world. As adults, we are their gateways to the world, to their future, and they look to us for guidance. Young children give the adults in their lives the precious gift of trust, and this is a gift to be accepted, treasured, and embraced, every moment of every day.

M.J. Richlen is director of the Yellow Springs Community Children's Center.



Our School

BY THE ANTIOCH SCHOOL OLDER GROUP

Twenty-three kids sit in a circle, piled onto well-worn couches, to describe what their school community means to them. They comprise the “older group”—a mixed-age class equivalent to fourth to sixth graders—at the Antioch School, in Yellow Springs, Ohio. They wiggle, talk, listen, and laugh, building on each other’s points. Some questions shape the discussion.

How would you describe your school community to someone who knows nothing about it?

Everybody helps you out.

We mix different grades, so you can get friends that are in different age groups. I’m in fifth grade and can have a fourth grade friend. Most of my friends are older, but I can be their friend.

It’s a nice, small community. The whole school is like a community.

It’s like everyone is the principal. There are seventy principals.

You learn different stuff, like riding the unicycle. You ride in parades. Unicycling is something no other school has. When you go out in public and ride the unicycle, everyone says “Wow! You’re good at that. How’d you learn to do it?” And you say, “I taught myself at the Antioch School.”

How do kids learn here?

You do things at your own pace, instead of all together at the same time.

The older people help you with stuff. It’s easier when you learn with your friends.

We have more free time, so you

can do stuff with people.

If we didn’t get as much free time, we’d probably want to talk more when we’re supposed to be working.

The teachers help you. If they give you a homework assignment, and you can’t do it, you don’t get graded for it. You don’t feel bad.

What if people have problems or make mistakes?

If there are problems, you talk about it, and figure something out.

You ask your friends, what would they do? Everyone contributes their ideas, and if you don’t like somebody’s ideas, you don’t go “Oh, I don’t want to do that.” You think about how it would fit. Maybe they don’t like your idea. You can work to make it so they like it.

If you make a mistake with a friend, and you realize you made a mistake that same day, you go and apologize. If you make a mistake in school, and you can fix it, you just fix it. If you can’t, someone helps you.

Sometimes it takes awhile to figure things out.

Why are the plays you put on so important?

You can really express yourself. You can bring all your different talents into the show.

If someone doesn’t have a part, you can add one in. We add more lines if someone wants a bigger part.

I really like making up the costumes, too. It’s really fun, just to have the costumes.

I think of acting as having two limits. One limit you want to pass. That’s like the center. If you don’t

pass that, it’s too boring for the audience. But if you pass the other limit, it’s over-acting and that’s too much.

I kind of like the controlledness of it. You can kind of twist the rules, so it fits your part.

I think it’s cool the whole group gets to choose the play, instead of just the teachers.

You can just go crazy and people think it’s OK, because you’re in the play.

The thing I like is it really gives you a chance to show how you feel.

I like acting because you can be someone else.

You’re still being yourself, but as a different person. It’s like you have a different life.

What have you learned about yourself in this community?

I’ve learned I’m a better actor than I thought I was. I’ve learned that I have a lot of different talents that I didn’t know I had before.

Just be yourself and don’t try to make some kind of fake image.

If someone is not being themselves, and they’re trying to impress you, you can say, “You don’t have to impress me.” I’ve learned that I’ll fit in just being myself.

I’ve learned two things. The negative thing is that I don’t like unicycles. The positive thing is that even though you throw together a kind of run-down building, a bunch of kids who are different, and a big field for soccer or football or whatever, you get chaos at first, but eventually it clears up. People go to the place where they’re needed.



Members of the Antioch School Older Group are Carly Bailey, Miriam Barcus, David Byrne, Asa Casenhiser, Polo Chaikwang, Ryder Comstock, Rosa Dixon, Evan Firestone, Anna Clare Forster, Joshua Green, Margaret Hild, Kumar Jensen, Zachary Katz-Stein, Vanessa Lewis, Jordon Lininger, Devinne Melecki, Abeo Miller, Ben Miller-Jacobson, Marina Owen, Rose Pelzl, Crystal Reedy, Jesse Rothman, Mori Rothman, Andy Sontag, Claire Triplett, Alex Turner, Erin Turner, Ben Welsh. They were interviewed by Gail Taylor and Krista Magaw.

Going Out

BY ANN FILEMYR

I remember racing across busy suburban intersections in the sprawl of new housing developments—split levels, ranch houses, swimming pools, and rectangular, shaved lawns—to the wild tangle and musk of the forest. The fact that the whole area had once been forest inhabited by the First Americans was something I was only dimly aware of at the time. My sister Kathy, our best friend, Shawn, and I understood instinctively that once we arrived at the enormous maple that dominated the old farmyard of the nature center we were utterly transformed. We were no longer three awkward girls underfoot in our torn jeans and sneakers; we were brave adventurers seeking the mighty secrets of the unexplored rim of reality.

We headed out without maps or guidebooks. We stumbled down faded paths, avoiding the main trails. We struck out cross-country, weaving our way through the wild, following in each other's footsteps. Every landmark of that forest we named according to our own sense of belonging.

One of our favorite places was Cape Shanky (SHawn, ANn, and KathY), an outpost we marked with a pillowcase billowing on the end of a stick, where cattails taller than my sister riding on my shoulders leaned out over the reservoir. Yes, reservoir, for this was no real wilderness area. This was a little second-growth woods marking the only farmland that side of Philadelphia allowed to go back to forest.

We climbed trees barefoot to the very top in order to sight the enemy—any human, approaching from any

direction was the enemy—knowing if we were caught we would confront the frowns of folks who thought girls should not be covered with mud. Our naked feet danced with the quick excitement of liberation. We had leapt across the boundary of appropriate behavior to be free, to be fully in charge of our own destinies there between the trees and meadow.

I can remember reaching up to stroke the taut muscles of the ironwood, or stretching out flat on my stomach to peer inside spring beauties, or rolling onto my back to watch the birds wheel between earth and sky. I remember the feeling of cold mud when the reservoir began to shrink in midsummer, and I can remember my mother's reprimands when we returned home long past dark, creeping in the back door.

Her anger masked fear, but we heard that, too. We received the message that night and girls were not to be together. We were told without words that we were the targets of danger; my brothers never received the same sort of scolding.

But it was worth it to us to take the risk because the joy of those stolen moments running free in the forest were not echoed anywhere else—not in front of the daily reruns on the square-faced baby-sitter blaring *Gilligan's Island* and *McHale's Navy* every day after school, not at the dinner table where we hid our peas in paper napkins, not sitting still with our hands on our desks, fingers pointed to make "little Christmas trees" in the boring row of grade after grade, backs straight in our little desks in front of those tired

old blackboards, which were really green as the leaves of the pin oak. Escaping to the nature center was *our only chance* in the trim houses of *Leave It to Beaver* America.

Did we know we were being groomed to be the housekeepers and cleaners, the moms and wives, whose lives were to be fulfilled inside the four walls of those sprawling sixties suburbs? Was our rebellion, our headlong rush to the nature center a route to find what might be truly *alive* in the center of our own beings? Even as children we were aware of the tangled politics in our parents' house, the evening arguments about bills and obligations, the awkward silences driving to and from the malls; was our escape an act of emotional survival?

Not even the first memories are ungendered. The chorus of grasshoppers singing you to sleep or the smell of cut grass on a humid evening or the delirious exultation of speeding down snow-bright hills in a plastic saucer—these should be free of the division of the sexes; they are not.

We were teased, called tomboys, ugly girls with scraped knees and chopped hair. So we embraced the identity. If our desire for unencumbered relationships with nature made us boys—so be it. We formed a club: STOP (Spying Tomboys On People). We learned to slink along between the hedges, ducking beneath the bay windows, creeping past the patios undetected to spy on the silly domesticated people trapped inside.

We kept palm-sized notebooks with holes punched through the top on shoestrings around our necks. The only way these mini-diaries could be taken from us was if we ourselves were knocked down in a struggle.

And so we learned to run fast, and we kept our notes to ourselves.

Ann Filemyr is a teacher, poet, essayist, and homebuilder. She is a member of the faculty at Antioch College and lives in Yellow Springs.



HANDS PHOTOGRAPH BY MORGAN LAURENS

“There Is That In Me . . . ”: Poems from McKinney Middle School

*There is that in me . . .
I do not know what it is
But I know it is in me*

—Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

On the following pages are poems by 8th-grade students at McKinney Middle School, Yellow Springs. Their teacher, Aurelia Blake, says of her students’ work: “It is about their lives. These poems were born of lists of the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings that weave a pattern in their lives. They are leaves of trees with deep roots and strong bark. These poems honor their roots.”

THIS IS ME
by Maggie Krabec

I am from animals
And intuitions
From what's wrong
And you're weird
From crystals
Pentacles
And inside jokes
From learning of lies
And good long cries
All within
The dark caverns
Of my mind
I am the owl
Always quiet
But never
Silent
I am
From head bangers
And complete strangers
From kitty cats
And killer instincts
From sunset
And moonrise
From black
And broken glass
In my torn apart
And put together heart
I am like fog
Quietly changing
Whatever she may touch

I AM FROM EVERYTHING
by Emily Dozeman

I am from everything,
Everything that is good,
Everything that is bad.
Nature is my home.
Rhythm and music are my art.
I am from the water,
Which all life needs.
I am from the snake,
Silently slithering sideways,
Minding its own business
Until someone steps on its tail,
Causing it to lash out in an attack,
Which can only be felt, never seen.
I am from the owl,
Noble and trustworthy,
Deep, in personal thought.
I am from the spider
That lives in the barn,
Eight legs for eight purposes
The eightfold path.
I am from action.
I am from reaction.
Water is my blood,
Blood, on which the earth thrives.
I am from the horse,
Steady and alert.
My name is unique,
My name is like no other.



HANDS

by Morgan Laurens

I am from rough hands
Somber writing hands and fast, stroking, painting hands
I am from the stirring silence and the disagreeable expectation
 From pools of spoiled meat
 Rotting
 Tainted
I am from those late nights in cars
Falling asleep on metal
And half hypnotic wakefulness
I am from unbroken satisfaction
Stretched
 And thin
And I am the spitting image
No different
Always assumed the same
A pabulum of thoughts
 Thinking nothing new
I am from the color green
Flashing neon lights are like the bright lights of someone I did not know
 Faceless
 And without a story
I am from messy fingers that trace around transparent colors
 And back again
 All of grease and dirt
Smudging, rubbing to the bone. They are raw, red, and calloused
 From humble sanctuaries
 Spirit
 Individuality
I am from boarding on a rippling green surface
And it hurts
I am from the long, lazy summer days that collapse
 And condense into winter
 It bites and snaps
 Shatters without a sound
I am from my hands
They are the blood-flow of the family veins

by Julia Swisher

WHO I AM
by Scott Murphy

I am from
The deep end of the pool,
As if I were a fish in the sea,
From basketball to soccer,
I am from
Eating Mexican food every other day,
As if I were in Mexico myself,
From looking at my self in the mirror,
Looking for something wrong on my face
I am from
"A job worth doing is a job worth doing well"
"Hey kid, Bonehead!"
From tacky suits as if I was going to a wedding or a
funeral
I am from
Where the Wild Things Are
From grounding and taking things away
I am from
Playing at the Big Toy with friends
From glasses and gym shoes
And that's where I am from



HISTORY OF MY COUNTRY
by Frederick Yobah

I am from Sierra Leone
The lion of the land.
I am from *The Lion King*, "Lorry in the River," and the Bible
Auntie Florence sitting outside the door
Reading the verses when school is over
Or at nighttime in her bed by lamplight.
I am from watches for older children,
Dark shades, and rings,
Gold and silver chains worn outside
But not to school.
I am from school uniforms with school badges on the heart,
Royal turquoise green dresses for the girls
Chocolate brown shorts for the boys
Soccer uniforms
Blue shirts and white shorts.
I'm from Hackeysack made from socks,
Moves that make my soccer better.
I'm from rice,
Golden fried green okra,
Corn as tall as trees.
I am from the market,
The stalls like small houses
Where everybody sells something
Coca-Cola, Sprite, fish, shoes, apples, mangos, bananas, and
batteries,
I am from women, mothers with babies on their backs
Ladies wrapped in Lapps
I'm from the masterpiece of the universe.

FROM TIMES PAST

by Cody Johnson

I am from the sky big, and
Blue
With clouds fluffy like a pillow
I'm from the mustard gold leaves of the old maple trees
Changing
Colors of the season
Changing, and falling
I'm from the sunlight
Filling the earth with warmth and nourishment
For new life to grow
I'm from the moon and the stars far away but
Twinkling
Just enough to see

I'm from the many faces, and family photographs
I'm from family gatherings full of family laughing
Like our lives will never end
I'm from the sleeping till noon and
Waking up with most of the day gone
I'm from all the spankings
I used to get as a young kid but telling my mom it didn't hurt
I'm from all the parties that have gone wrong
Seeing sad faces as well as scary faces
I'm from the basketball
Bouncing
Waiting
Waiting to be shot



THE GAME

by Jake Fulton

I am from big brick 150-year-old farm houses
Breathing on the cold windows and writing my name
Taking it ten yards at a time, one day after the other
I am from "The Lord gave me what I have and what I know"
Family that put me together and keeps me together
Understanding people and places
I am from
Skipping stones across the pond and having one splash
Falling off, getting up, dusting off, getting back on
I am from
Making the Super Bowl winning touchdown pass
Playing on a gravel basketball court in the rain
Sit ups, running and working hard to make myself better
I am from
Time not seen but traveled

VAIN IMAGININGS AND OTHER ARTIFACTS

by Hyacinth Wallace-Blake

<p>While I rested on your chest as a baby I was unable to see where you'd be In the future of my feelings So Grandma's hot chocolate Holds my hands on "tit-bit-nippley" days That even padded bras can't warm And shirts can't hide I'm in the women's collard greens and black-eyed peas Safe on New Year's Eve Deep within the hefty meal to survive a millennium When we toasted with fake beer and sipped cider champagne In Waterford flutes, Swinging to the Rainy Day Rock to Rockafella Shank I was gentle when I was young and rocking But I threw my Ken doll in the furnace Now I'm surrounded by my kind These women-folk, penny-collectors and all but blind Dusting crystal collections of elephant figurines Trunk up for good luck I'm told my beauty's only skin deep To keep me right and righteous In tight clam-diggers and canvas pants Stacked and scattered across A bleach-stained carpeted floor, I've got my Lemon Pledge and black plume feathers</p>	<p>Gun-metal blue nail polish And my mystery bone The one I found on the street While running for my life No one to hold me back Or on his chest And rock me rock me just a little while So I've learned to sing blues solo And a cappella in the park Though she still just sings In the shower and the stairwell I am from her The lone songwriter And I can't stop strumming Her humming and singing Her dreaming, 'til the day she dies I suck on my Nixie the Pixie pen and contemplate I score 40's on math quizzes sometimes and I hid all my baby pictures taken with you Did you even know I Wore pink glasses in kindergarten? So proud and so brave that first day On the yellow school bus When the children made me cry Words still do the same so I've refrained And never asked you Would you even know me, now?</p>
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It Takes a Village—It Really Does

BY JEWEL GRAHAM

I listened to the half dozen young people who had come to talk about what it was like to grow up in Yellow Springs in the fifties and sixties, and what it was like to come back here to live as adults—some with children of their own. Obviously savoring their reminiscences, they had adventures to recount and lots of stories to tell about treasured relationships. Later I thought about what they had said as they talked during the long evening, trying to summarize in my own mind a way of understanding what community had meant to them.

What I thought I heard them saying was that it was good, very good, to grow up here. So much so that after searching for a community where they could replicate, or at least approximate the ambiance of community they remembered, they had decided to abandon the search in other places, and to return to the place where what they were looking for already existed. The conditions they valued about having grown up in Yellow Springs, I decided that they had said, were essentially these four—intimacy, freedom, safety, and diversity.

Intimacy meant knowing people and being known by them in informal ways. It meant running into people one recognized and/or knew when walking down the street, or the time for errands being expanded because of errant conversations about family members, friends, events that intervened in almost every encounter—the engaging in gossip that is the glue of community. Intimacy meant the feeling that the village officials were real human beings—available on the

street or on the telephone.

Freedom was the ability to make one's own social life, one's own friends, one's own agenda. It was mobility. It was roaming Glen Helen and going to movies at the Little Art. Freedom was made possible by the feeling of safety. The parameters of freedom were stretched by the bonds of safety. And safety was reinforced by the intimacy that made anonymity difficult or impossible, that was more forgiving of youthful missteps, more expressly congratulatory of their achievements. The diversity of the community made it possible to know people of other races, faiths, life styles, social classes, even political views, and to know them well enough that they were removed from the category of "the other." Indeed, demystification of the "other" was probably one of the most important perspectives provided by the Yellow Springs they grew up in.

When they left here, they assumed that there were similar communities, and that they would not be difficult to find. I have already said that they did not find that to be true. My question to them was whether their return experiences have borne out their expectations. Mostly they replied that they have—with the huge exception that housing has become too expensive for the existence of the kind of community they remembered.

That conversation led me to reflect upon the experience of our own children growing up in this community. Our two sons were born in 1956 and 1959 respectively. That made one a "boomer," and the other at the tail end of the boomer generation.

The economy still benefiting from the post-war demands for everything was strong and expanding. The Civil Rights movement was in full force, and there was the air of anticipation and excitement that things in the U.S. were finally going to change for African Americans. In many ways Yellow Springs was an intentional community—attracting people of all races who were looking for a place to live. Local manufacturing concerns led the way in making opportunities available for all comers. Antioch College, always a strong force, was a "hot" school, turning away most of the students who applied, but still infusing the community with a large and active contingent of students, faculty, staff, and alumni through employment and shared community activities. The "points of entry" into community life were numerous and easily accessible—the vibrant churches, the strong and active League of Women Voters, the influential Junior Chamber of Commerce, the budding Credit Union, and many other organizations as well.

Lest I leave the impression that it was well nigh perfect, there were of course the risks that parents always worry about—drugs, sexual behavior, vandalism, careless driving, bad companions, poor school performance. . . . There were remnants of segregation, and in fact our involvement in the public accommodations struggle brought telephone threats of harm to our children. On the other hand there was a caring community, determined to protect its children and to eliminate segregation entirely. Where else would the Chief of Police



know everyone in town—their strengths, their problems, their relationships—and where else would the elementary school teacher come after a regular school day to work with a child bedridden with rheumatic fever? Where else would the property tax levies for the support of schools be guaranteed passage, and where would volunteers make it possible to provide free swimming lessons and soccer teams and other activities as well, and where would care for elderly neighbors be so personal? And on and on.

For many years now our sons have lived in the Bay Area of California—the harbinger of what life in the United States is likely to be like in the future. I believe that the experience of growing up here prepared them well for the diverse and challenging world in which they now find themselves. At the time we, along with other parents we knew, questioned ourselves about the wisdom of raising children here. Would it really prepare them for the “outside world”? We had questions on

two scores. One was whether growing up in the intimate, protected environment of a small town would handicap them for life in the large impersonal settings of the modern world. Another, especially for African-American parents, was whether growing up in relative freedom from the most blatant racist practices would deprive them of the knowledge and experience—the protective armor—they needed to cope in a racist society.

On both scores the community did well. Both of our sons went to large universities. Both ended up living in metropolitan areas. Both have built careers in fields that have not been readily accessible to African Americans. Both have established solid families. They maintain friendships with the folks they grew up with. In their own neighborhoods they have made relationships and created conditions that are rooted in the values of community. While I concede that our attentive parenting, a loving extended family, and their own natural endowments contributed to

their ability to meet life, I must acknowledge the importance of the supportive environment of this community. It takes a village—it really does.

I am well aware that the community as it is now is not the community of the fifties and sixties, and it is not realistic to expect it to be, given the rapid and far-reaching nature of today’s societal changes. Nonetheless, I can’t help but wonder whether Yellow Springs still provides for its children the feelings of intimacy, freedom, safety, and diversity that were reported by at least some members of former generations of young people. I hope so.

Jewel Graham, with her husband of 48 years, has lived in Yellow Springs since 1956. She recently retired after 30 years at Antioch College, Paul from 38 years at Vernay Laboratories.

My History as a Ghost

BY RACHEL EVE MOULTON

I was born in a small house in Goes, Ohio, just south of Yellow Springs where my mother, with permission of the landlord, painted a mural on the nursery wall while she was still pregnant with me. For a time, the mural—the globe with three bunnies twice its size hopping around it—was still visible from the road when the house lights were left on and the curtains open. My father had just graduated from Antioch, a school he'd chosen over all others simply because of a rule found hidden in a promotional brochure: *Shoes must be worn at graduation*. My parents were high school sweethearts and my mother had given up the East Coast for married student housing and the Dayton Art Institute until my father graduated, and they realized they were seven months pregnant and happy about it. My father had applied for teaching positions all over the United States. Both of them were hoping for something on the West or East Coast. They'd even gotten close enough to mail a trunk of clothes off to what seemed like a decent job near Seattle. Their clothes made it much further than they ever did and floated across country experiencing the road trip they'd planned for themselves. Soon after, a job opened up in the Springfield City Schools along with a tiny house with asbestos shingles on Pleasant Street where I would spend my first ten years.

My partner and I just recently moved back from Boston. We were there for two years exactly, almost to the day. Like all children of this village, we were desperate for something brighter, noisier, bigger,

but mostly just someplace where we could be anonymous. We felt we'd done our time in Yellow Springs as if it was a prison or a mental institution. We loved Yellow Springs, but we'd had enough.

Having gone to Antioch partly to follow in my father's footsteps and partly for the co-op program, I'd traveled a lot. I'd lived briefly in San Francisco, Boston, Scotland, and traveled the US living out of the back of a Honda hatchback. I've seen enough national parks and major cities to confuse Yosemite with Glacier and Portland with Providence. I'd seen Japan and France before I even got to college, but it wasn't until this final post-graduation move that I realized in every town, state, and country I visited, I was always looking for that small niche of awkward houses, main street shops, just-passing-on-the-sidewalk friendliness, and unshaven female legs that I'd intentionally left behind in Yellow Springs.

At first even taking the T, Boston's subway system, felt freeing. There I was packed in tight during rush hour, touching people in places I wouldn't dream of otherwise going near, and yet I knew none of them. I didn't even have to speak or smile. I had no name, no responsibilities, no relatives to remind me that what I was wearing, saying, or doing was in or out of character. I fell in love with green apples bought at the corner store to be eaten in the Public Garden, the small dirty restaurants that filled Central Square with the smells of curry and fish and french-fried grease, the readings held at an independent

bookstore where Sherman Alexie, Joyce Carol Oates, and David Sedaris had all stood within months of each other. There was that possibility of doing something stupid or dangerous or outrageous and no one would ever know. It was beautiful.

I was in graduate school, working full-time, writing a novel, and walking around the city with my mouth open. When I began to realize my degree would soon be earned and wonder why I'd worked so hard, sometimes over-crediting, to get through the program quickly, my partner and I started talking about moving back. It wasn't that Boston had ceased to awe us, but it was clearly not permanent, clearly not our home. It was too expensive, too noisy, too full of concrete. Suddenly we missed Yellow Springs. At the time, it was strange. We had missed family and friends, but we had not missed the town itself; and yet as soon as it was suggested possibilities started popping up. People whom we had thought of fondly were now offering us jobs, a place to live, reasons to move back to something quieter.

I began to dream about the town. These dreams were vague, with no clear characters or plot, unlike most of my dreams. They came as visions or snapshots that I'd wake up with in the morning still trying to collect and tack down to a photo-album page. The steps of my parents' front porch peeling a barn red and needing to be painted, the sag of the Swinging Bridge leaning slightly toward the river on the left, and the stretch of sidewalk on Xenia Avenue where the crab apples litter the ground in the

fall. It was as if I was trying to collect enough snapshots to make a motion picture that would lead me back. Eventually it did.

I am back in this town that still and always will feel a little haunted. I know every place where the tree roots are pushing up the sidewalk, I've been in almost every house, and I've got the storefronts memorized. There's a woman who still works in the bank—twenty-five years later—who saw me the day my parents brought me back from the hospital. This town has a texture and taste, a smell and sound so familiar that sometimes it is hard to distinguish it from my own blood, my soul, or whatever it is that makes my body keep beating.

There's a low concrete wall on the north side of town where I broke off my front tooth, a field even further north where my best friend and I discovered a dead cat whose bones were still reddish brown from decomposition, the small square of pavement downtown where I got and gave the first kiss that made me understand what my body might be capable of feeling. It's all here, and there are moments in the morning on my way to work or at night on my way home from the late show at the Little Art Theatre that I catch a glimpse of myself skittering by. Rachel, still short and lonely at age ten, loved her bedroom windowsill. Rachel even younger climbing a tree that seemed tall enough to break bones. Rachel wading through South-Glen-river mud hoping to discover some secret that would make her special. All these memories are tactile—the warp and splinter of windowsill wood under my palms, tree sap on my fingertips that would speckle my jeans with suspicious brown spots, and the smell of that river stronger and darker than it would be now even if I stood in the exact same spot in the exact same clothes, and tried to think the exact same thoughts.

Maybe everyone has these ghostly visions of themselves when returning to their hometown. Maybe

they all wince at their past moments of embarrassment and the high school reunions that happen when you only want to buy milk or tampons. Maybe.

Since moving back by choice, by desire, I've begun to see the privilege in all this more clearly. My parents joke about being stuck here, my high school friends and I tease each other about getting sucked back in over and over. The danger of it is similar to catching mononucleosis, measles, or religion. I still have moments when I look around and wonder at the scenery and think it is all one big Hollywood set, an experiment to see what kind of person moves back from a good life in the big city to this small Ohio town with no ocean or dance club in sight. I wonder if it is weakness that draws me back, but I know it is something better and more complicated than that.

The thing about growing up in Yellow Springs, about knowing and caring about 4,000 different people is that I've always known who I am and, if I've ever forgotten, there is a town-full waiting to remind me. Lately, I've been tempted to knock on the front door of that house in Goes. The windows have been dark since I moved back, and I'd like to know if my mother's rabbits are still on the wall. I've held back not out of shyness or my busy life but because I don't really need to know. I'm a mix of the years I've lived, of my ghostly selves and those of the people I love most. Some of these ghosts are hard to acknowledge, but they are all here at the heart of this place that existed before me and will still exist after. A place that I know will not forget me.

Rachel Eve Moulton is teaching at Antioch College. She recently completed the manuscript of her first novel, Tinfoil Butterfly. She's been a writer since those early days on Pleasant Street.

PERCH

by Amanda Williamsen

I followed father down and down the dark tube of the boat. The bodies in the cooler slapped and flopped in ice and foam.

Later, in the basement—soaking cardboard, pink filet—I put my finger on their eyes: soft discs in silver mail.

The tails that fanned as fingers fan, white globes of eggs, white spine—I shivered nearer to the legs of Daddy in his jeans.

And later still, in goldfish-dream, the tiny gold filets lay breaded on the counter: gasping at me in sleep's doorway.

Amanda Williamsen teaches at Capital University, Dayton. She lives in Yellow Springs.

Home

BY SHULY X. CAWOOD

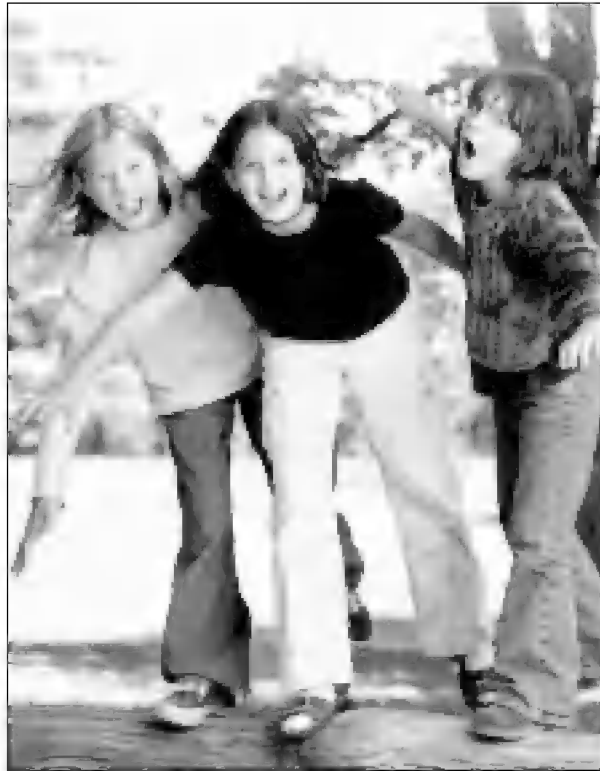
To Sabrina, Linda, Jennifer, and especially Erika, who brings me home every time we talk

We all speak the same language, we five who grew up in a small town tucked in the beltline of Ohio between cornfields, a Jesus Loves You sign, a Glen of pines and pathways, and a KFC the whole town fought against years ago. We gather in Chapel Hill now and know that no one needs to pop open a dictionary to define Mills Lawn, Young's, or IGA Land. My husband, when he joins us, must tire of all the words, names, and memories we conjure effortlessly out of air.

I've tried, but I know no sentences will really convey to him what it was like to grow up in that small village of mine where people know not only you, your siblings and parents, but sometimes even your "other" family members. My husband never experienced what it was like to be completely unsurprised eighteen years ago when people came up to me—the afternoon our dog escaped our fenced yard to join a festival two blocks away—and said "Sable's on the hayride."

I will never have the words to make him understand how the bark felt on my back or how the tears plunked on my lap as I sat against an old maple during recess the one time I did something wrong in elementary school and was "tree-ed."

I can't truly explain what it was like to have Shirley Mullins sit beside me in the fifth grade and gently tuck a violin, a cello into my hands and let me screech until I found the viola that



would later take me to Indiana, Canada, and Chicago with my friends in the orchestra. I can't teach him what it was like to stand on Gaunt Park's high dive at twelve years old and feel petrified and thrilled that I could almost see the world.

He'll never hear cowbells and think of football games, or roll down his car window and recall cruising down Xenia Avenue with a pile of friends in hopes that someone, somewhere was doing something more fun than him and that he could find them. I doubt he grew up as I did, being color-blind and then startled at the world once I stepped out into it.

He's shocked we rattle off people's names as if we'd all studied

the same phone directory. He can't believe it's a given that almost everyone knew not only all the people in their class but at minimum every person in the two classes above and the one below. And that we keep up.

And so when we five gather in this new place, we pull home out of our hats like magic tricks that no one can see but us. And so it isn't to my husband but to Erika that I can lean over and whisper about something I see, "This is so Yellow Springs" and know there's no need to explain. She knows exactly what I mean.

Shuly Cawood is always welcome in her hometown.

Dogs Ran Free

BY HEIDI VIEMEISTER

I was born in Yellow Springs in June 1951. My memories are clouded from my teen years, and my quest for righteousness and freedom.

I grew up on South College Street, before the street was paved. My parents bought ten acres of cow fields, subdivided it, and named it Talus Drive, after the rock formations in New Mexico. The ten acres and an old house with no plumbing cost approximately \$5,000.

There they built their new house. I was three when we moved to the big house on the hill. When we went on vacation, we never locked the door. And dogs ran free.

Near our house was a swamp where all the kids in the neighborhood would catch tadpoles in the spring and ice skate in the winter.

The Village dump, where people dumped off unwanted pets, was a great playground. One summer a reputed "black panther"—the animal, not the radical—was seen wandering around there.

The only place to go swimming was in John Bryan State Park. Then the Village built the pool right in our back yard.

I would ride my bike to the Riding Centre to go on trail rides to the Pine Forest and canter down the old wagon train road. There were chickens at the Riding Centre then.

In the winter, B. J. and Mike Peterson would hook up the team of horses and we would go on hay rides and sing Christmas carols. In the spring some of us would ride horses to the Tastee Freeze on "two-for-one day." The horses would have their

ice cream, and we ours.

In the fall the village would gather on Mills Lawn to make apple butter, cooking it forever over open fires. At Christmas, instead of the trees being chopped and scattered, the Village would gather them all up and put them in the parking lot in Gaunt Park. Then there would be an enormous bonfire, and tons of folks would come and sing songs and stuff.

The lake in the Glen seemed to be huge; I fished there a few times and got lost on the other side. The dance pavilion was just off Xenia Avenue. I remember some folks roller skating there, before it fell apart. The sidewalk is still there, leading to nowhere. Eventually, the dam broke, and the lake ran out. It was never fixed.

Village sewage ran through the Glen. The water was pretty darn stinky, and we weren't allowed to play in it.

The schools used the Glen more then. We would go on long hikes, and study water and creatures in the water, fix the stepping stones, hang out at the School Forest, and learn about the wonders of nature. It seems that we were there every chance we could get.

Antioch College was booming, with at least 800 students per quarter. The campus was full of activity. Sightseers would drive in by the bus-load to view the hippies.

Yellow Springs had a terrible reputation as a town full of communists, a town of radicals and un-American types. There were quite a few people who were blacklisted during the McCarthy era in the mid-

'50s, and they lived in Yellow Springs. Antioch attracted these folks. They helped create the atmosphere for new learning, questioning authority, demanding answers, demanding rights and equal opportunities.

Yellow Springs made *Life* magazine as a result of the civil rights demonstration over barber Louis Gegner's refusal to cut blacks' hair. There was a riot, with tear gas and guns. I was not allowed to go to town that day. We went to Gaunt Park hill to see if we could see anything.

I got to see Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when he came to commencement at Antioch, and that was very exciting.

In the late sixties, these professional drug counselors arrived from New York to educate our parents about drugs. Like shooting speed into your eyeball, as if there were a lot of us doing that. If we drank orange juice, we were on LSD. They had all kinds of ideas, and turned our parents into paranoid adults. The real news is, we tried lots of drugs and had lots of fun, and most made it through pretty well unscathed. A few didn't, but most did.

This is the town I remember, where I grew up. Everyone did their jobs, to their utmost and more. The village was run by a few, and we made do with less. My father always said that "less is more." After all, the "less" one has, well, the "less" you have to take care of, and the "less" headaches you will get.

Heidi Viemeister recently returned to live once again in her hometown.

FIFTH ESSENCE, AGE 4

by Liz Porter

"Quintessence: the highest essence in ancient and medieval philosophy that permeates all nature and is the substance composing the heavenly bodies."

Snowball, Bang-Bang, Popeye—
names we gave to the shell-shocked
staggering remnants of men
in our time as children.
They scared us silly—
shouting "Look out!," staring wildly
into the mock oranges or coloring maples.
We circled them like swarming gnats
trying to be seen.
Mothers murmured that they were harmless,
their minds hurt in The War.
What was War?
One of them marked the beginning
of my own night-time visions. Always at twilight
his uncertain step shuffling
down the sidewalk outside my window
signaled the arrival of chaos, loss,
wolves beneath my bed.
Dolls, stuffed animals, piled like ballast around me,
I spent the darkness recklessly, and sure.
We ruled the neighborhood by day, we children,
loved, fought, shared secret hideouts,
shocked ourselves with meanness and daring
joyously testing the edge of existence all the while—
even when we pushed Timmy into the pond
just to see how deep it was, even as we kicked shins,
cheated in games, lit forbidden matches,
and later, watched each other's sexual budding
with unrequited longing . . .
rainbows in water spray, butterflies freed from cobwebs,
colors, aromas, all sensation shot through every cell:
turquoise, sulfur, viburnum, rhinestone,
thunder. Muddy sneakers' leaded intensity
crushing blades of grass in our rush—
we were the ineffable space
between the light and the dense and we flew wildly
freely, in that minute infinite.

Liz Porter is a Hospice nurse. She lives in Yellow Springs.

Children in Community: A Group Discussion

ORGANIZED BY *COMMUNITY JOURNAL*

Participants

Bob Barcus, psychologist
Aurelia Blake, teacher
Kit Crawford, teacher
M. J. Richlen, childcare director
Faith Patterson, teacher, mentor
Don Wallis, mentor

Moderator: Amy Harper

Videographer: Patti Dallas

Edited by Amanda Williamsen

Amy Harper: We're here to talk about kids, the kind of issues that you see them having to deal with, their concerns, the things they're thinking about, the problems they are having and how we as a community can be supportive of them, how we can be a child-centered community.

Don Wallis: We selected this topic out of concern for the state of children or the state of childhood in our culture, in our society. It seems like children are in crisis. Perhaps our whole culture is in crisis, but it seems to come out most dramatically in the children.

Kit Crawford: You're saying our culture is in crisis and the children mirror that? I think culture impacts children in a different way. Their experience is not the experience of the general population; they see things differently, and therefore I believe that they are so much more vulnerable to a culture in crisis, and so much more impacted by it. I'm seeing that in a lot of ways, in so many ways you can't ignore. I'm very concerned about the children and very concerned about our country being able to deal

with this kind of crisis, a crisis of children in our culture.

I think there are some ways of looking at young children that can organize our thinking about that. The one I think is important to talk about here is a child's sense of belonging—where the children feel they can fit in and can develop a sense of identity.

Faith Patterson: I think there's often a breakdown at the beginnings of children's lives, where so many kids are in families that are separated, or where they're taken care of by people other than those who are their birthing people. In my day, and I'm just so sure that it worked so well, it's that old saying that the community takes care of children, the neighborhoods take care of children. Always I felt that my family was all around me—all the time, taking care of and nurturing me—whether it was my mother or my father or my grandmother, or my neighbor across the street, or someone who taught algebra, there was always that sense of knowing that you were a part of that structure that was supportive and caring for children. Today so many families are so separated, neighborhoods are so separated—and our children pay the price. So I think we have to look at ourselves first, what we think and what our values are.

M. J. Richlen: I live in the world of young children—it's one of the passions of my life. At the Children's Center the teachers often sit down together and try to remember if there were as many challenging children in the past as there are now. And the

whole situation where a child gets up at six-thirty in the morning and is taken to an institution at seven o'clock to be cared for by someone other than a family member—that's frightening to me, and that's my work! So in terms of that sense of belonging, I know that's something the children struggle with a good deal.

We're very concerned about the aspect of the world of Disney taking over the imaginative play of the children, because developing the imagination is critical to later learning, and we see more and more of the imaginative play of the children is centered on Disney, which tells us of the great power of that in their lives and how much contact they have with it. We're also concerned at the lack of outside play that children now have at their disposal. Many children spend most of their time inside. They don't at the Children's Center and I know they don't at the Antioch School either, but there are many different degrees of childcare opportunities in our nation, some of them very poor. And the children are suffering greatly.

Aurelia Blake: Time at home used to be spent talking. And during times of talk, such as over the dinner table, or doing chores together, there was talk; and with talk there was an exchange of values—that's how values get handed down. Even little kids pick up on this. But now there's so much noise—you go home, put the earphones on, and plug in. I saw a commercial for a car where the parents were happily driving along because the little kids are quietly watching a cartoon on a TV in the

back of the van. Little kids are plugged in. My students come to class and they plug in. There's so much noise that there's not enough time to listen to the people in your life.

I assigned my students a poem that involved talking to relatives; a kid came back and said, "Wow, I never really talked to my grandma before." And I said, "Why, does she live in Florida or something?" And the kid said, "No, she lives right down the road." I see a lot of disconnectedness, not because parents are working, but because when you are home, everybody's plugged into something else, TV, etc. Technology—the more we get connected to technology, the less connected we are to each other. There's this sense that "the message" is not inside us anymore; it's out there somewhere, and you have to go someplace to get it.

M. J. Richlen: I see a great deal of love in the families, love for the children from the parents, but there's so much in their lives, they don't know how to put it all into place so that the children are attended to properly. So many seem to be very tired, and hurried.

Bob Barcus: I'm concerned about the availability of models for kids to learn from. It's the problem and the solution. One of the good things about living in a small town like this is that there can be other adults around for kids to know if the parents aren't always around. But when I see kids in my practice, very often they don't know much about their parents. So if kids aren't knowing what their parents are doing, how much time do they really have to observe their parents acting like adults? Do kids have adult models they have enough time with?

Replacing that, I think, is the media onslaught. Kids have models given to them; whether they're good, bad, or indifferent, they're given to them. Some of them are horrendously misbehaving athletes, some are music people who portray grotesque behavior. There are good models out

there as well, but they're all manufactured. Kids need the diversity of really knowing real people—like knowing their grandparents.

Kit Crawford: Children take in the messages of the culture that we don't necessarily spell out for them, but that are as clear as can be. They absorb those messages. Children are growing and learning and looking around and wondering, "How do I fit in? What am I supposed to do?" And if they can't somehow find the affirmation of who they are in their childhood, as they grow older they're going to be looking to the culture to tell them who to be. And the culture is right there to tell them who to be. And that's frightening for me to think about.

And the children that you work with, Aurelia, are at an age where they've absorbed layers of that and they are beginning to parent each other. They are creating their own culture and it's something that adults aren't allowed to be a part of. So by not bringing our children into our lives more, by allowing other influences to tell them who to be, we're creating a need for them to find themselves somewhere else.

Aurelia Blake: I came along in a time when people said, "It's your thing, do what you want to do." But there are a lot of consequences that go along with that! If we just let children "do their thing," we're doing them a grave disservice. Yes, you pursue truth; yes, you pursue your quest; yes, you go and find yourself. But the idea that whatever you do is okay, is *not* okay. And there are a lot of children who don't know how to put someone else before themselves. Our consumer-based culture is based on creating other needs. To acquire all those things you are told you need to have, you can't be overly concerned about the other person. Our economy is based on teaching you to be self-gratifying, and if you're not getting those lessons of kindness somewhere else, then we're doing a grave disservice to our youth.

Faith Patterson: There has to be someone to teach the kids that everybody counts. Even teaching kids to take turns and not interrupt a conversation is important. When we train them in this when they're really small, that becomes a part of them. When they're little they only think me, me, me, and it's up to us to teach them to respect and care about others.

Don Wallis: In Jeannie Felker's description of her kindergarten group [this issue of *Community Journal*] I see kids interacting freely and forming their own community as they go. They do it beautifully; I would say they do it naturally, it's like human nature for them to do it. There is the creation of an environment where the children are free to express themselves, to do their own thing not in a negative way but in a positive way, and they *are* considerate and respectful of each other.

Kit Crawford: There's an axiom that unless you have enough of something yourself, you can't give it away to others. And if you're living in an environment where you have what you need, you're going to be able to turn around and share yourself with others. And if children are living with people who provide them with those messages, they're going to be able to do that.

M. J. Richlen: It's a very magical process. Young children learn by imitation; and also the young child wants to be a true inhabitant of the world, of the earth. The children want to learn. A teacher like Jeannie does it very quietly, but it's all modeling. When Jeannie talks with a child, she knows that other children are listening and watching her. She sets up in a very beautiful, subtle way, situations for the children to learn to be very social.

Bob Barcus: If I could teach parents one thing when they come into my office, it would be to listen to their kids. Parents always say do this, don't

do that, but how often do they really listen and inquire about what their kids are thinking?

Kit Crawford: I think what's happening today—and I think the children are feeling this—is they are kind of being raised as commodities. We are pressuring our children to be marketable, to be someone else's idea of what's good. It's not any more about being yourself, being who you are, respecting others for who they are.

Amy Harper: So what should we do as a community? What about us as individuals, in our families, and as role models in the community? What are the ways we as a community can support children?

Faith Patterson: When kids leave their homes and go into the schools, and every teacher in the whole school, except maybe one or two people, is white, then what is that saying to the kids? Role models should represent a cross-section of the community, there should be models where kids can say, Oh, there's somebody like me. People here don't even look at that as important, but it's important to all the kids, and maybe we should think about that.

Don Wallis: I think the whole thing about role models is very difficult. All we've said about children needing role models applies to the adult culture, too. We don't have role models either. So I think it's unrealistic to talk about what we're doing for the kids. We have such a disconnected culture—how are we going to teach children connection?

Bob Barcus: Thinking about what our community offers kids that's good, I think one of the things we have going for us is that we do have a lot of adults involved in the community with kids. Look at the high school play every year. All around the community there are activities that engage kids and adults together. No matter how busy we think we are, we

need to get out of our insular lives and get involved with our kids and community. When that happens, kids get to see adults in multiple roles. When they see someone who is a cop in town mowing the lawn at the Antioch School, that's a wonderful way for kids to see adults as real people. Around town, when I see kids and adults engaged together, I see opportunities for kids to thrive—and they do. What breaks my heart is that some kids are still not involved. Some of that is the responsibility of the parents. Parents need to take the initiative. There are tons of kid-friendly activities in this town.

Faith Patterson: But some parents don't get their kids involved because they don't feel welcome, they don't feel any outreach. If there's just a certain contingent of people that always participates, some others might not feel welcome.

Aurelia Blake: First there has to be awareness of what the child needs. To dress them, give them money, send them to school—that is *not* everything that a child needs. Sometimes I'll ask parents why they didn't sign up for soccer, for example, and the parent says she didn't know about it. Well, parents need to take initiative. There's a responsibility that goes with living in a community. To live in a community and be disconnected from the community, to me there's a certain amount of neglect there—certainly not in terms of doing something wrong, but in terms of not doing enough of what's right.

Faith Patterson: I think the high school should have some kind of course so that young people can become aware of what it means to be a parent.

Don Wallis: All this is easy to agree with, but I think there's something more serious going on. I think the kids are very angry, the adults are very angry and afraid—I don't think the culture is able to deal with this

anger—I don't think that's in place in any community.

Bob Barcus: This community works for a great number of kids. There are kids who really thrive here.

Kit Crawford: But if we look at the whole country, the whole culture, there are a lot of kids who are making it, but that just exacerbates the feelings of the kids who aren't making it. And that's a lot of kids.

Bob Barcus: In this town I see a lot of parents who have adopted a permissive parenting style. There is a fair amount of research on what kind of parenting works, and a lot of the people who aren't making it—they come from a permissive parenting style. Permissive parenting is a loser.

Don Wallis: I disagree totally.

Bob Barcus: Well, sure, for some people it works. But statistically, if you want to gamble, you gamble on an authoritative parenting style. It sets limits for kids that are clear and known and allows tremendous freedom in the middle. It's democratic and effectively oriented. Research shows that you've got an 80 percent chance of raising an okay kid this way. The risk is you might get some one who's hostile, angry, nasty, and who will be a loser.

Aurelia Blake: The kids I see, from upper elementary through high school, who seem to feel unhappy and distrustful and disconnected, are usually children who are not connected with people in different ways, different activities. Kids who are connected get to express themselves, they get to release it with somebody. The ones that don't have those different outlets are the ones who feel tension, sadness. The ones I see who are involved with different things are not locked in—they have different friends, don't feel like they have to wear certain clothes to fit in—they cross lines.

M. J. Richlen: But that doesn't happen immediately. Isn't it true that there is a very good chance the child must have been growing into their anger, or their success, for many years? For the children who are angry as teenagers, possibly this has been happening for many years, in different ways.

Amy Harper: So we need to start, from a young age, to give kids a sense of belonging, a sense of who they are. The angry kids you talk about have not had that. We've talked here about how to give kids that sense. So what do we do for the kids who don't have that?

Kit Crawford: If the community hasn't helped the child get a sense of himself, hasn't helped the child have enough experiences of success—then there's somebody out there in the community who can give them that. Mentors work—it's filling in a gap in basic human need.

Aurelia Blake: I feel like there's a strong need for tribal membership with our children. You gotta get out into the tribe. You got to learn to dance with the tribe. If parents say, "Well, my child's just a loner," there still has to be a place in the tribe for that child to be a social being. Even though that may be one's natural inclination, there are still social needs that must be met. Children need to learn to connect, or it'll show up as a gap later in life. Children must connect with people, and I mean make genuine connections—not superficial, but genuine. And preferably including adults of different ages, different positions in the culture.

Don Wallis: How does this happen?

Aurelia Blake: I think you need adults who take on responsibility. There's this thing in me that says, "If I don't, who will?" If I'm concerned about where my 16-year-old and 14-year-old are, then I need to be there. It requires me to be involved in their

youth group, to drive them hundreds of miles a year, to get them up and take them to events, to make sure that when we have our religious gatherings, they're there. That's what it takes. It takes adults saying, "I've got to be there. If not me, then who?"

Don Wallis: I think we might listen to what we are saying to children as a community. One of the things children hear loud and clear from the Yellow Springs community is that when they come downtown, the sidewalks are for tourists, not for the kids. I think they take that to heart, and I think we have sent that message. Many of us might be surprised that they hear that, because that's not what we mean. So we might look at that.

Kit Crawford: Yes. Because the culture is so crazy right now, and because communities are little representatives of cultures, I think people need to remember to speak in this way to create time and space for children. When they look around and ask themselves, with their behavior, is there space for me here? Is there time for me here? Do people value me here?

Amy Harper: And I think we need to ask this of ourselves: If a child asks that question, have we done enough of what we can do for them to answer Yes.

Readers, Write!

You are invited to contribute to
Community Journal

Upcoming themes:
Elders in Community
Community and the Land

DREAMER, DREAM A DREAM by John Hempfling

Dreamer, go ahead, dream a dream
Dream of a place,
A place
In which life has no meaning,
That the stuff we do
Is all erased
Like white-out on ink,
Gone,
Yet
We're still here.
Dream,
Dream that we can't die,
That some things just don't change,
That all are invincible against time,
Yet
We're still here.
Or Dreamer,
Dream that everything's alive,
That the stuff that sits all day
Has an opinion,
That they are intellectual,
Yet
We're still here.
Dream that all have a say,
And can do as they like,
Unburdened by physical
impossibilities,
Yet
We're still here.
Or,
Dreamer,
Dream,
Dream as thee likes,
Yes, you'll like that!

John Hempfling, age 10, is a student at Mills Lawn School, Yellow Springs.



AT A COMMUNITY RALLY TO "SAVE THE FARM"
YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO, 1999
PHOTOGRAPH BY DENNIE EAGLESON

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